

Helsingin yliopisto - Helsingfors universitet - University of Helsinki ID 2000-608

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Työn nimi-Arbetets titel-Title Varieties of Mutual Support and Voluntary Action - A Study of Finnish Self-Help Groups and Volunteers		
Oppiaine-Läroämne-Subject Social Policy		
Työn laji-Arbetets art-Level Doctoral dissertation	Aika-Datum-Month and year 2000-08-17	Sivumäärä-Sidantal-Number of pages 166
<p>Tiivistelmä-Referat-Abstract</p> <p>My study builds a conceptual framework of phenomena mutual support and voluntary action. I describe how self-help groups and volunteering are organised, what kinds of tasks are performed, by whom and for whom. In addition, mutual support and voluntary action will be located in the Finnish society according to their relation to other sectors (public sector, market sector, and households). Goals of self-help groups and motives of volunteers are studied with a variety of data (questionnaires, documents, articles) and methods.</p> <p>The study consists of five articles and a summary article. In the first article, voluntary social and health organisations are examined in relation to the public sector in four countries Finland, Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Article two describes the structure and activities of self-help groups (n=173), and article three illustrates how self-help groups and voluntary activities are combined in the associations of unemployed. In article four, volunteers' (n= 479) altruistic and individualistic motives are analysed, and in article five, young volunteers' (n=664) motives are compared in five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden).</p> <p>In the summary article, the results are discussed in their historical, conceptual, and societal context. The results clearly indicate that self-help groups, volunteers, and voluntary associations neither can be defined as one phenomenon in voluntary sector, nor can they be located in one spot in a societal framework. Historically, self-help groups are based on the ideologies of self-help and mutual support (mutualism), and voluntary action on Christian charity and philanthropy. The Finnish voluntary sector in the 1990s can be described by a mixture of motives (individualistic-altruistic-togetherness), various voluntary activities (individual, group, organisational), hybrids of associations ('we-for-us', 'I for-you') and self-help groups (citizen, associational, public, mixed; personally oriented, empowerment-oriented). Self-help groups and voluntary associations are characterised by innovations and evaluation of public services. Through mutual support and voluntary action, citizens acquire experiential knowledge that could be useful in planning and implementing social and health services.</p>		
<p>Avainsanat-Nyckelord-Keywords</p> <p>self-help groups - motivation - membership</p> <p>mutual support</p> <p>voluntary action - altruism</p>		
Säilytyspaikka-Förvaringsställe-Where deposited		
Muita tietoja-Övriga uppgifter-Additional information		